

**PSYCHO-SOCIAL STUDY OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIP OF THE  
OLDER GENERATION IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE***

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**ABSTRACT**

Marriage is an important episode in the story called life. It is also conspicuous theme of Jane Austen's fiction. This research paper will concentrate on the psycho – social study of marriages of the older couple i.e. is Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Austen deals with different basis of marriage viz. physical attraction, emotional compatibility, intellectual understanding, mercenary motives and selfish motives. Austen's greatness can be seen in her dealing of personal and social relations. She goes neck deep in the exploration of human relations via the theme of marriage and relationships. To her marriage is both means of financial security and status determining factor. How Jane Austen approaches, explores and projects marriage and human relationships are central to this paper.

Marriage is trying to have the same feelings, love and understanding for the same person for the whole life. Ideally speaking marriage is there, where life begins and love never ends. Marriage is a divine quality that adds love, trust and value to life. It is the union not only of two bodies or minds or souls but also of two (un)known families. True husbands and wives are blessings for each other. David Monaghan quips, "Courtship is relegated to the periphery of *Sense and Sensibility*, but it-reassumed a very central position in *Pride and Prejudice*"(Monaghan 64). The subject matter is introduced in the very first sentence of the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune, must be in want of a wife"(PAP 1). This novel deals with the marriages of five major couples – one older and four younger. This research paper will concentrate itself on the psycho-social study of the marriage of the older couple that is Mrs. and Mr. Bennet.

The concept of marriage emerging from the married life of Mrs. And Mr. Bennet is the marriage based on outer attraction. Mrs. Bennet's outer charms and Mr. Bennet's attraction for her remind us these words of Faiz:

Teri Surat Se Hai Aalaat Mein Baharon K Sabaat,  
Teri Aankhon K Siva Duniya Mein Rakha Kya Hai(Faiz47).

Mrs. Bennet's beauty strikes Mr. Bennet's eyes as is held by David Daiches: "Mr. Bennet had been captured by a pretty face"(Daiches 753). Mrs. Bennet is presented as a charming lady. And it is her physical beauty which captivates Mr. Bennet profusely and he is proud to have her as wife. It is a crude fact of life that as the time passes physical beauty fades away but inner beauty increases. As Shakespeare writes :

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark(Shakespeare190)

The case of Mrs. And Mr. Bennet is not different from this reality. When the novel opens, one comes to know that they have been living as husband-wife for twenty three years. When they were married Mrs. Bennet was quite beautiful, but her growing age has swallowed her beauty. As a result of it, there seems little warmth in the relationship of Mrs. And Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet is presented as an indifferent, irresponsible and sarcastic person. He keeps on criticizing his wife and daughter except Elizabeth. His criticism of her daughters is evident from his conversation with his wife. He speaks about his daughters, "They have none of them much to recommend them, replied he; they are silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters"(PAP3). At this Mrs. Bennet reacts, "Mr. Bennet how can you abuse your own daughters in such a way"(PAP3)? Actually they hold different opinions about their children as they exist at quite diametrical plane of intellect. Evidently there is no mutual understanding between them. Austen satirically writes, "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character"(PAP3). Mr. Bennet keeps on hurting his wife through his sarcastic nature. She complains, "...you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves"(PAP3). These words of Mrs. Bennet are enough of an evidence that her marital life lacks that compatibility understanding or depth that can be seen in Jane's relationship with her husband or even more clearly in Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy. Indeed Mrs. Baennet has her own limitations. David Daiches says about Mrs. Bannet's married life, "... the resulting marriage tied him to a foolish and vulgar woman for the rest of his life"(Daiches 753). Austen also writes, "Her father captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her"(PAP 209). These words of the novelist not only indicate the motivating force behind the marriage, but also the displeasing nature of the marriage. Mrs. Bennet is beautiful but is called stupid. Austen writes, "She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous" (PAP 3). Truly speaking Mrs. Bennet enjoys skin deep beauty, but she lacks that intellectual beauty which forms the basis of the marriage of her two daughters, Jane and Elizabeth.

A critical analysis of Mrs. And Mr. Bennet's conjugal life shows that they are unbearable to each other. But being married they have to pass their time in each other's company. Mr. Bennet tries to derive satisfaction from the sources other than his wife. The author humorously writes, "...he was fond of the country and books and from these tastes had raised his principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement"(PAP209). Mistress of delightful irony, Austen humorously highlights that Mrs. Bennet's ignorance and 'folly' is the true sources of amusement. But under the strain of this delightful irony the creator seems to leave a serious opinion: "This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit for such as are given."(PAP209)

Indeed Mrs. and Mr. Bennet are poles apart in the sense that Mr. Bennet is unindulgent and indifferent but Mrs. Bennet is excessively indulgent and very much concerned about her daughter's marriage. They always differ in their views. Mrs. Bennet inspires him to visit Mr. Bingley, his sisters and his friend, Mr. Darcy to seek husbands for her daughters. But Mr. Bennet seems unwilling to do so, no doubt later he visits Mr. Bingley, but he lacks the enthusiasm of his wife. The difference between the views of these two becomes obvious, when Mr. Collins makes an offer of marriage to Elizabeth. Mrs. Bennet wants Elizabeth to accept the proposal but Mr. Bennet clears the point: "An unhappy alternative is before you Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents – your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do"(PAP100). This dissimilarity of ideas obviously makes the lives of the parents hellish. Not only this it creates confusion for the children also. To emphasize the adverse effect of parents' incompatible life, the novelist critically writes, "Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort"(PAP209). The domestic lives of Mrs. and Mr. Bennet is so much disgusting that there exists no domestic happiness in their lives. There is no faith, no, love. Mr. Bennet has no respect for his wife. To quote from the novel, "Respect, esteem and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown."(PAP209)

To top it all Mr. Bennet does not abstain from insulting his wife even in the presence of his children. As a result of it, Mrs. Bennet becomes the victim, not only of the contempt of her husband but also that of her children. Austen makes Elizabeth her mouthpiece to criticize the behaviour of Mr. Bennet. To quote from the text: "Elizabeth however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain...that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children was so highly reprehensible"(PAP209-210). The conjugal relationship of Mrs. and Mr. Bennet is steeped in irony, so much so that they are held responsible for the faults of their children. Walter Allen quips, "In Miss Austen's world the errors and follies of the young are always, in part at any rate, the result of faulty upbringing: behind the wickedness of Lydia Bennet in her elopement with Wickham lies the foolishness of her mother and the irresponsibility of her father"(Allen 111). Lydia's fortune is marred in her elopement and Austen holds, 'the ill adjustment' of Lydia's parents, responsible for it. Not only Lydia but the most promising girls like Jane and Elizabeth also suffer due to their parents. Elizabeth's union with Mr. Darcy and that of Jane with Mr. Bingley are delayed due to the manners and behaviour of their parents. It is evident from the explanation of Darcy to Elizabeth: "The situation of your mother's family,

though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters and occasionally even by your father – pardon me”(PAP176). Mr. Darcy loves Elizabeth and Bingley loves Jane, but both these friends delay to marry them because of the silliness and carelessness of their parents and three sisters. About Mrs. Bennet’s character G. Ernest A. Baker examines, “Silly, incredibly ignorant and irresponsible, she was a dreadful infliction for those who were in any way dependent upon her. She alone would justify all Darcy’s strictures upon the Bennet family, and what a thorn in the flesh she must have been to Elizabeth!” (Baker 92)

In fact, the union of two beings through marriage forms the smallest unit of society that is family. Society is nothing else but family in macrocosm. And what to say about fate of society whose foundation is laid on the couples such as Mrs. and Mrs. Bennet who lead a life devoid of emotional depth and intellectual understanding. The novelist seems to suggest that their lives prove a bane not only for themselves but also for their children and other people of society who are known to them. Such marriage as that of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet causes ill health to society. Austen seems to convey the same idea which Pope preaches in *The Rape of the Lock*. In his own words, “Charms strike the eyes but merit wins the soul.”(Pope421)

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